

The Dynamics of Regional Head Candidate Selection and Its Implications for Local Democracy: A Case Study of Medan City, Indonesia

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Abstract

This research analyzes the political dynamics in the selection process of regional head candidates in Medan City. Through a qualitative approach, this research reveals the candidate selection process of political parties such as PDIP and Gerindra and its impact on local democracy. The research method involved interviews, FGDs, and descriptive-analytical analysis, focusing on inclusion, transparency, and accountability. The results highlighted that factors such as identity politics, money politics, and central government intervention had a significant impact. Although Regional head Elections is considered a platform for local democracy, the candidate selection process is often still closed and influenced by elitism and oligarchy within political parties. Internal conflicts within political parties demonstrate the dominance of DPP influence and centralization of power within the party. Corruption cases involving local officials highlight the importance of integrity and transparency in clean governance. However, the deliberative model is emerging as an alternative that can improve inclusion, transparency and accountability in the selection process of local head candidates. The deliberative model is proposed as an alternative to enhance a fairer and more democratic selection process. Thus, this research provides insights into the challenges and opportunities in the development of local democracy in Medan City.

Keywords: *Dynamics; regional head; elections; candidate; selection; local democracy.*

Introduction

After the New Order era, Indonesia entered a new democratic phase marked by decentralization and regional autonomy (Kodiyat et al., 2020). The 1998 reforms paved the way for significant changes in the country's political structure, with four constitutional amendments between 1999 and 2002, as well as administrative decentralization measures in 2001. One of the biggest changes was the direct election of regional heads, from governors to mayors and district heads. The first free and fair elections since 1955 took place in June 1999, and in 2005, Indonesia began two major waves of direct regional elections. However, while decentralization allows for more control at the local level, the practice of selecting and determining candidates for regional heads is often complicated and controversial. Law No.22/1999 gave DPRD's the authority to select regional heads, which resulted in manipulation and political party intervention in the selection process (Agung, 2018). In addition, the law gives DPRD's a major role in the screening and selection of candidates, which often leads to collusion between the executive and legislative branches of government. In reality, this practice tends to create collusive relationships and internal conflicts within political parties (Eddyono, 2018; Nasution et al., 2024).

Criticism of the selection process for regional head candidates in Indonesia also reflects dissatisfaction with centralization within political parties. In many cases, the party's Central Leadership Council (DPP) has full power in determining candidates, while regional administrators often need to be more informed. A striking example is the conflict within the United Development Party (PPP) in North Sumatra during the 2018 regional elections, where the DPP PPP directly intervened in the DPW's decision, removed its chairman, and replaced him with someone who supported the DPP's decision (Junaidi, 2023; Rofiq, 2023). This shows how strong centralization is in political parties, which can lead to significant internal conflict. Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government attempts to regulate the process of direct election of regional heads but still greatly influences the central management of political parties (Nasution et al., 2023). Even with laws mandating democratic and open recruitment, in reality, centralized decisions by political party DPP's persist. Law No. 10/2016 gives additional power to central administrators, allowing them to take over if there is a dispute with regional administrators. Therefore, the selection process of candidates for regional heads in

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Indonesia is often a field of conflict between party centralization and local decentralization, which often results in unstable political dynamics.

Based on the explanation above, this research has three main objectives: First, to analyze the internal dynamics of political parties, especially PDIP and Gerindra, in the recruitment process of regional head candidates in Medan City in 2020. This analysis aims to reveal how the parties carry out the selection process and the factors that influence their decisions. Second, to determine the impact of the candidate selection process on the development of local democracy. This includes evaluating the extent to which the selection process contributes to increased democratic participation and representation at the local level. Third, to find a more democratic and deliberative candidate selection process model in the context of regional head nominations by political parties. Thus, this research is expected to identify best practices to increase transparency and participation in the political recruitment process (Simandjuntak, 2021; Ikhsan et al., 2022).

This research is expected to provide several benefits. First, it contributes to the development of science, especially in the field of political science. The results of this study can provide new insights into political recruitment mechanisms at the local level and the role of political parties in this process. Second, this research can contribute to the development of development studies, especially those related to the development of local democracy and the strengthening of political parties. The findings of this research are expected to be a source of reference for researchers and policymakers. Third, this research can enrich discourse and theory in local democracy development efforts. This is important to provide input to stakeholders in policy formulation. Fourth, this research can also provide a clear picture of how deliberative democracy processes can be used in the recruitment of regional head candidates. This information is useful for the evaluation and comparison of political party policies in the context of determining regional head candidates so that political parties can adopt more democratic and transparent practices.

Literature Review

Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy is a form of democratic governance that emphasizes the importance of deliberation and public participation in the decision-making process. It refers to conditions such as information, balances, togetherness, oversight, and equal consideration, leading to an idealized process of interaction (Rosalind et al., 2021; Haliim, 2016). Deliberative democracy is often contrasted with other forms of democracy, such as representative democracy, where citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf (Willis et al., 2022; Markjackson, & Ayibatunibofa, 2024). Deliberative democracy allows for a more thorough exploration of complex issues, encourages consideration of diverse perspectives, and aims to increase the overall legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic governance (Goodin, 2017; Stasavage, 2007). However, there are challenges to implementing deliberative democracy and maintaining deliberative practices effectively in democratic governance systems (Svensson, 2020; Lewanski, 2011).

Deliberative democracy can be implemented in democratic governance by applying the principles of good governance, such as transparency, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, rule of law, and equity and inclusiveness (Dirlanudin, 2013). Democratic governance must commit to debate and build a commitment to deliberation, which can be applied through the ethics of democratic discourse. Democratic governance must also pay attention to the role of government in implementing development based on the potential and socio-cultural conditions of the community, as well as thinking globally and behaving locally (Rahmatiani, 2016). This principle is important to have a main force that is able to take care of the needs of the community in an accountable and transparent manner (Usman, 2011). Deliberative democracy requires a significant investment of time and resources, which involves bringing together different groups of people to engage in meaningful discussions, which can be costly and time-consuming (Hendrawan et al., 2022). In addition, ensuring that all voices are heard and represented in deliberative democracy processes can be challenging, requiring outreach efforts to engage underrepresented communities and individuals.

Deliberative democracy is designed to encourage open-mindedness and respectful dialogue, but this may be difficult to achieve in a polarized environment. Bias and prejudice can also influence the outcome of the deliberative process, making it difficult to reach a truly representative consensus. Deliberative democratic processes are often small-scale and local, so scaling up these processes to the level of national or even global decision-making can be challenging, as it requires substantial resources and infrastructure. Therefore,

deliberative democratic processes must be perceived as legitimate and trustworthy by the public to be effective. However, there are challenges in maintaining trust, especially in the face of political polarization and disinformation. Implementing deliberative democracy as a long-term solution to democratic governance challenges requires a commitment to continuous engagement and dialogue, making it difficult to maintain the momentum and interest needed to sustain these processes over time.

Political Party

A political party is a nationally based organization formed by a group of Indonesian citizens. It has the purpose of fighting for and maintaining the political interests of members, society, nation, and state, as well as maintaining the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Utama, 2023). The purpose and function of political parties are to become a means of political education for cadres, society, and the state, as well as a forum for the political participation of Indonesian citizens (Agung, 2018). Political parties also have a function as a means of absorbing, collecting, and channeling people's political aspirations in formulating and determining state policies (Alfikhi, 2014). In addition, political parties also function as a means to prepare cadres of prospective national leaders, forming party cadres who can function as political management in the country (Hajar, 2022). Political parties are essential to the functioning of a democratic system, as they facilitate the peaceful transfer of power through elections and help improve the quality of life of citizens. Despite some criticism and declining public trust, political parties remain an integral part of democratic governance, shaping the direction of national policy and ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented in the political process (Riski et al., 2023; Malik, 2020).

Political parties play an important role in influencing policymaking in a democracy by representing the interests and ideologies of different groups in society (Sembiring & Nasution, 2024). They are responsible for shaping the political landscape, engaging in debates, and advocating for policies that align with their respective ideologies. Political parties propose policies and regulations that reflect their ideologies and the needs of their constituents, which will ultimately result in laws and policies (Christopher et al., 2024). Political parties may form coalitions with other parties to gain support for their policies and to exert greater influence in policymaking. Political parties engage in public discourse and campaigning to shape public opinion on issues so as to influence government priorities and policies, as elected officials are often responsive to the concerns and desires of their constituents (Pasaribu & Adhani, 2024). Political parties nominate candidates for public office, and their success in elections determines the composition of legislative and executive governments, allowing political parties to have a direct impact on policymaking by placing their members in positions of power (Ginting & Fauzan, 2024).

Local Politics in Indonesia

The local political system in Indonesia involves the dynamics of democracy, identity formation, and ethnicity politics as an integral part of the democratization process at the local level (Alfarabi et al., 2019). Local politics in Indonesia has gone through a process of democracy and reform in two decades that has produced paradoxical results. Political reform in Indonesia through asymmetrical decentralization, which is the delegation of authority given to Aceh and Papua in order to re-embrace regions that want to separate themselves from the Republic of Indonesia (Utami, 2022).

On the one hand, the massive installation of modern democratic institutions has been carried out. On the other hand, the institutional design has presented traditional political forces that tend to create political oligarchies, one of which is clan-based (Fokatea & Mas'udi, 2020). At the local level, local elites have an important role in the formation of a new post-reform Malay identity, which aims to provide a more strategic image and social position in the community. Until now, oligarchic politics is still operationalizing one of the problems, namely land grabbing in Indonesia, that occurred after the New Order (Ananta, 2017). It can create divisions at the local level between local communities and elites and support a combination of motives in elections, inefficiencies in public services, and people's desire for prosperity (Mahpudin et al., 2021). Local politics in Indonesia also provides authority for local governments or decentralization in shaping policies, which shows the relationship between politics, bureaucratic capacity, and output (Arif et al., 2022).

Method

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the candidacy process in the 2020 Medan City Regional Head Election (Pilkada). This approach was chosen because it is concerned with the depth of data and analysis of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). We followed a systematic procedure, referring to the guidelines suggested by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2018), which emphasized steps such as distinguishing, replicating, comparing, cataloging, and classifying the object of study. The data obtained was then analyzed using the descriptive-analytical method, focusing on an accurate and rational interpretation of the data.

The informants for this study were selected through the purposive sampling method, with the consideration that they are political party functionaries from PDIP and Gerindra at the DPD North Sumatra and DPC Medan City levels who have an in-depth understanding of the candidacy process in the 2020 Medan City Pilkada. The data collection techniques used include desk research, in-depth interviews with key informants, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with resource persons relevant to the research theme. Data validity was guaranteed by involving party functionaries, expert resource persons, and academics who are in line with the research field. We used four principles of data validation, namely confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility, as the basis for ensuring the trustworthiness of the research data. Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman and Saldana model (2018), in which data were analyzed interactively and continuously. The stages of analysis include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, which aim to build a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Results and Discussion

Political Demography of Medan City

The 2019 legislative elections brought changes to the composition of the Medan City Regional House of Representatives (DPRD). The total number of Medan City DPRD members reached 50, representing various political parties. In the election, ten political parties managed to place their members in the Medan City DPRD. These parties cover a wide ideological spectrum, with the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), National Mandate Party (PAN), Democratic Party, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), Golkar Party, Hanura Party, United Development Party (PPP), Gerindra Party, Nasdem Party, and Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI). This diversity of political parties reflects the political plurality in Medan City, marking the involvement of various views and interests in local governance. These parties also play a key role in the decision-making, legislative, and supervisory processes in Medan City's governance system.

Table 1. Number of legislative members by political party and gender in Medan City.

No	Political Party	Male	Female	Number of Legislative Members
1	PKS	7	1	6
2	PAN	6	-	6
3	Demokrat	4	-	4
4	PDIP	10	1	9
5	Hanura	2	-	2
6	PPP	1	-	1
7	Gerindra	10	3	7
8	Golkar	4	1	3
9	Nasdem	4	-	4
10	PSI	2	-	2
	Total	50	6	44

Source: Central bureau of statistics, 2022.

Politics in Medan City has a character influenced by the legacy of colonial history, as well as sharp differences in terms of race, religion, and economic interests. This has an impact on contemporary political dynamics, where patronage practices, identity politics and money politics still characterize the political process in Medan City. During the Dutch colonial period, government reports indicate that political movements in East Sumatra were hampered by factors such as diversity in national, racial, and religious character, as well as sharp differences in the economic interests of the population. This legacy continues to influence Medan City politics, which is characterized by religious and ethnic identity-based patronage politics, as well as strong money politics practices (Reid, 1987). In the context of post-reform legislative

elections, money politics became a common phenomenon in Medan City. Legislative candidates had to provide money to pay voters to vote for them, with the level of electability largely depending on the amount of money prepared by the candidates (Kansong, 2020). Identity politics also plays an important role in the process of mobilizing electoral support, with ethnic and religious associations being the main bases of support. For example, candidates from the Batak ethnicity utilize clan networks to reach voters from the same group. At the same time, candidates from the Chinese or Muslim ethnicities also use their networks to garner support (Muhtadi, 2020).

The presidential election in Medan City confirmed the strength of identity politics. The results of the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections showed that religious and ethnic identities strongly influenced candidates' votes. Prabowo was portrayed as a candidate supported by Islamic groups and clerics, while Jokowi was portrayed as a candidate whose Islamicity was unclear. In the 2019 presidential election, sub-districts with a majority Muslim population tended to support Prabowo-Sandi, while sub-districts with a non-Muslim majority supported Jokowi-Amin.

Based on the results of this study, it is clear that identity politics and money politics are still major factors in the political process in Medan City, reflecting broader challenges in building an inclusive and representative democracy. Efforts to address these issues require an approach that focuses on increasing transparency, reducing money politics, and promoting diversity and inclusion in local politics. The following are the results of the vote in the 2014 Presidential Election:

Table 2. Vote acquisition in the 2014-2019 presidential election per sub-district in Medan City.

No	Sub- District	Presidential Election 2014		Presidential Election 2019	
		Prabowo-Hatta	Jokowi-Kalla	Jokowi-Amin	Prabowo-Sandi
1	Medan Kota	16.439	33.517	27.948	18.756
2	Medan Sunggal	27.470	24.877	28.575	34.152
3	Medan Denai	38.688	28.462	31.156	47.616
4	Medan Barat	19.269	20.754	23.242	22.160
5	Medan Deli	39.353	29.295	33.629	50.575
6	Medan Tuntungan	12.319	27.223	34.237	12.743
7	Medan Belawan	21.862	17.425	20.444	28.334
8	Medan Amplas	33.273	20.573	22.789	39.680
9	Medan Area	32.862	22.676	22.146	38.196
10	Medan Johor	33.926	27.539	32.771	42.894
11	Medan Marelan	39.648	20.964	21.017	54.320
12	Medan Labuhan	28.948	22.552	24.936	37.014
13	Medan Tembung	36.652	26.457	28.561	43.798
14	Medan Maimun	12.801	9.913	10.716	16.071
15	Medan Polonia	11.286	12.637	15.251	12.724
16	Medan Baru	6.607	12.637	13.916	6.922
17	Medan Perjuangan	25.497	24.598	26.361	29.538
18	Medan Petisah	11.954	22.355	24.486	13.259
19	Medan Timur	28.108	28.932	30.946	32.050
20	Medan Selayang	19.764	25.578	30.002	24.061
21	Medan Helvetia	33.517	35.254	39.092	40.346

Source: (Kansong, 2020)

The political journey in Medan City, especially in the context of Regional Head Elections (Pilkada), has undergone significant changes since the reform era. Before the reformation, the Mayor of Medan was chosen through appointment, not direct election by the people. The first local elections in Medan were held in 2005, marking a new era in local democracy. However, the history of Pilkada in Medan City is colored by various dynamics and challenges. The 2005 Medan election was a battle between two pairs of candidates who had previously served as Mayor and Deputy Mayor, namely Maulana Pohan-Sigit Pramono Asri and Abdillah-Ramli. Abdillah-Ramli won the election with the support of the majority of political parties, except PKS. However, this victory was marred by an alleged corruption case involving Abdillah and Ramli, who were eventually sentenced to prison. The next Deputy Mayor, Rahudman Harahap, was also implicated in a corruption case, exposing serious problems in local leadership.

The 2010 local elections made history with the largest number of candidates, 10, which was narrowed down to two in the second round: Rahudman Harahap-Dzulmi Eldin and Sofyan Tan-Nelly Armayanti. Rahudman-Eldin eventually won, but again, Rahudman stumbled into a corruption case and had to leave his post, handing over the position of Mayor to Dzulmi Eldin. In the 2015 elections, Dzulmi Eldin and Akhyar Nasution won, but Eldin was also involved in a corruption case, and Akhyar took over as Mayor until the 2020 elections. The 2020 elections featured two candidate pairs, Bobby Nasution-Aulia Rahman and Akhyar Nasution-Salman Al-Farisi. The election results showed that Bobby Nasution, a newcomer to local politics and President Jokowi's son-in-law, managed to win the election by a small margin from Akhyar Nasution, who previously served as Mayor. PDIP's decision to support Bobby Nasution over Akhyar Nasution reflects the party's internal dynamics and potential conflicts arising from the candidate selection process.

The multiple cases of corruption in Medan's local leadership paint a bleak picture of the integrity of public officials and clean governance. The Transparency International Indonesia (TII) survey even named Medan as one of the most corrupt cities in 2017, highlighting the need for fundamental changes in the way elections and governance are conducted. This history serves as an important lesson for Medan City's political future and underscores the importance of integrity and transparency in the selection of local leaders.

Elitism and Dynastic Politics in the Selection of Candidates for Medan Mayor

Candidate selection in politics is an important process that shows the character of the party and the direction of state policy. Initially, candidate selection involved only political parties, cadres, and sympathizers. However, over time, this process involves the entire nation. Candidate selection is closely related to political recruitment, which involves placing people in public office. In practice, not all parties carry out this process in the same way. In Indonesia, the selection of candidates for regional heads in political parties is closed. Although there are formal and written recruitment standards, informal actions often occur in the selection process, which is full of political pragmatism. This has an impact on the quality of candidates produced, with some parties tending to select candidates from outside their cadres who have the resources to fund campaigns. These conditions result in oligarchy tending to strengthen, both in the context of general government and within political parties, where the role of elites dominates decision-making.

In the case of the 2020 Medan Mayor election, several major parties were involved, including the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and the Democratic Party. PDIP endorsed Bobby Nasution as a candidate for Medan Mayor, but this candidacy process caused friction within PDIP, especially at the Medan City management level. Secretary of DPD PDIP North Sumatera, Dr. Sutarto, explained that Bobby Nasution's nomination process had gone through party procedures, including registration at the DPD level of North Sumatera, even though he did not register with the DPC PDIP Medan City. The mechanism for determining candidates determined by the center (DPP) is an order that the entire party hierarchy and cadres must carry out. Non-compliance with the DPP's decision may result in dismissal.

Gerindra Party, which has enough seats to nominate its mayoral candidate, chose to enter into a coalition with PDIP, supporting Bobby Nasution and nominating Aulia Rahman as the Deputy Mayor candidate. This reflects the coming together of the two factions of the 2019 presidential candidate, where former contestant of the 2019 presidential election, Prabowo Subianto, Chairman of Gerindra's DPP, is now part of Jokowi's cabinet. The Democrat Party is also contesting the election with Akhyar Nasution, a former PDIP cadre who has experience as deputy mayor and acting Mayor of Medan. Akhyar moved to the Democrats after PDIP no longer endorsed him. PKS, a party in coalition with the Democratic Party, has a more democratic internal mechanism for determining candidates, including through internal surveys and public opinion polling. They also open opportunities for their cadres and administrators to become regional head candidates. The striking difference between PKS and the United Development Party (PPP) is the process of determining candidates. In PKS, the mechanism is more open and democratic, while in PPP, candidate names are determined directly by the center without involving city and provincial-level parties. These differences reflect different approaches to candidate selection and demonstrate the challenges of ensuring a democratic and fair process in Indonesia's political system.

Based on the results of research on the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, including the Medan Municipal Election, several important facts and findings were found relating to the implementation of democracy during the COVID-19 emergency period and the role of political parties in the candidate selection process. The implementation of the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, including the Medan Municipal Election, took place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made various countries, including Indonesia, impose social and physical restriction policies to suppress the spread of the virus. In Indonesia, large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) are implemented to regulate various aspects of community activities. The rules for implementing PSBB are regulated through Government Regulation (PP) Number 21 of 2020 and Presidential Decree (Keppres) Number 11 of 2020. The strong intervention of the central government during the pandemic has affected the democratic climate, where many aspects of community life and the economy are under the control of the central government.

During the COVID-19 health emergency, the central government's authority was highly centralized, including in controlling gathering permits and restricting people's movements. This provides the potential to be used as a political instrument in supporting the winning of certain regional head candidates. According to Dr. Warjio, there are indications of health dictatorship where the central government can use state instruments to support the desired regional head candidates. For example, despite many voices asking for the 2020 Pilkada to be postponed, the central government continues to hold the Pilkada in a health emergency. Findings from the research show that political parties still need to have a candidate selection mechanism that is open and involves cadres and the prospective voting community at large. No political party has a special institution as a selectorate, and decisions from the central board are absolute, without being able to be vetoed by regional administrators. Elitism in political parties plays a significant role in the selection of candidates for regional heads, with elite intervention from the center to the regions that cannot be separated from oligarchic interests.

One case that stands out is the selection process of Bobby Nasution to run in the Medan regional head election, where he was not a PDIP cadre who pioneered his career in the party but received a ticket to run over other more senior and experienced PDIP cadres. The intervention of President Jokowi, who is his father-in-law, was an important factor in this. The centralized selection process resulted in a need for more public trust in political parties and their candidates, which was evident from the emergence of alternative methods to bring up the names of candidates chosen by the public outside the party. Overall, the results show that the implementation of the 2020 simultaneous regional elections in the context of the COVID-19 health emergency brings challenges to democracy and opens space for central government intervention in the political process. The centralized candidate selection mechanism and the intervention of political party elites also affect people's trust in the democratic process and political parties, creating a need for a more transparent selection mechanism that involves the wider community.

Analysis of Medan Mayor Election with Deliberative Model

In the context of the Medan Mayor election, the analysis based on the research results shows several key issues relevant to the deliberative approach, namely inclusion, transparency, and accountability. The deliberative model encourages public involvement in the candidate selection process. The results show that the selection process within political parties in Medan tends to be closed and elite-dominated. This can be seen from the way large parties, such as PDIP, determine candidates without involving the wider community or even party cadres at the regional level. In the deliberative model, public involvement becomes an important aspect to ensure that people's voices are heard in the selection process. Research shows that there is a need for mechanisms that allow citizens to provide input and have a role in the candidate selection process.

Transparency is key in the deliberative model. The research revealed that the candidate selection process in the Medan regional head election was often closed and influenced by the interests of the party elite. For example, the selection of Bobby Nasution as the mayoral candidate by PDIP caused controversy because he was not an experienced party cadre but gained support due to his family relationship with President Jokowi. The deliberative model emphasizes the importance of transparency in candidate selection, where selection procedures and criteria must be clear and accessible to the public. Thus, public trust in the selection process can increase. Accountability is a vital component of the deliberative model. The results show that corruption cases among Medan officials are a serious problem, indicating a lack of accountability

in local leadership. The deliberative model promotes accountability through public participation and transparency. If the candidate selection process is more inclusive and transparent, then accountability to the public will increase, as elected candidates will feel more responsible to the people who elected them.

The deliberative model seeks to overcome elitism and oligarchy in candidate selection. The results show that elites and oligarchic interests often dominate the selection process in political parties. In the deliberative approach, political parties are expected to open the selection process to various voices and avoid the concentration of power in a handful of individuals or groups. This will create more opportunities for competent candidates who need to have elite connections to participate in the selection process. The deliberative model provides a framework that can be used to analyze and improve the candidate selection process in the Medan mayoral election. By prioritizing public engagement, transparency, accountability and overcoming elitism, this approach can help create a fairer and more democratic selection process. The results indicate the need for improvement in candidate selection in Medan, and the deliberative model provides guidelines that can be followed to achieve this goal.

Conclusions

The results of this study highlight the political dynamics that influence the selection process of regional head candidates in Medan City, especially in the context of the Regional Head Election (Pilkada). Factors such as identity politics, money politics, and central government intervention play an important role in the process. Although Pilkada is considered a stage for local democracy, the candidate selection process often still occurs behind closed doors and is influenced by elitism and oligarchy within political parties. Internal conflicts within political parties, as seen in the case of PPP during the 2018 Pilkada and the controversy surrounding the nomination of Bobby Nasution by PDIP in the 2020 Pilkada, demonstrate the dominance of DPP influence and centralization of power within parties. Political dynamics in Medan City are also influenced by identity politics and the legacy of colonial history, with money politics and patronage being common phenomena.

Corruption cases involving local officials, including the mayor, highlight the importance of integrity and transparency in clean governance. However, the deliberative model is emerging as an alternative that can improve inclusion, transparency and accountability in the selection process of local head candidates. By applying this model, the selection process can become fairer and more democratic, which in turn strengthens public trust in local democracy and political parties. To overcome the challenges faced, a more inclusive, transparent approach is needed, focusing on reducing money politics and promoting diversity and inclusion in local politics. As such, this research provides an in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities in local democracy development in Medan City.

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